

## **The Road Less Traveled – March 24, 2017**

A few weeks ago, I preached a sermon during which I talked about the difficulty we have in finishing a long journey. Looking at the end of the story of Gideon in the Old Testament book of Judges, I said this:

*We are at our most vulnerable at the end of the journey, when the battle has been won, when we've reached our goal. It's why we're most likely to go out and binge on food as we're approaching our target weight, or why our study habits are the worst the week after midterms, or why church attendance is the worst the week after Easter. It's because we're most vulnerable at the end of a journey. We're more likely to turn away from God in the moments after God has used us mightily. In the blink of an eye we can find ourselves following our own ambitions, our own desires, our own notion of what we are to be, rather than following God.*

I believe that to be true of Gideon's story in the Bible, and I believe it to be true in our own stories, both as individuals and as a church. I especially see this truth playing out right now as we near the end of the church-wide visioning process that we've called *As For Me & My House*. This is a process that we started back in late September. The Nominations Committee selected a 10-member leadership team representing a cross-section of the congregation. That leadership team and I have worked under the guidance of Dr. Eric McKinney from the Texas Methodist Foundation to help us chart a vision for the future of Aledo UMC.

But it wasn't simply to be our vision. These past months we have been on a quest to discern God's vision for our church, where God is leading us as a faith family, who God wants us to be as a people of Christ. It is no small task, to be sure, and it has proven to be frustrating at times. It's simply not the way we are used to operating. It seems like we have been at it a long time. Some of you – and honestly some of us at the epicenter of the process – are getting impatient to do something already. To make some plans. To plot a strategy. That's the way we normally go about making plans. We set a goal, create a plan and then execute it.

But not this time. This time, this process of visioning is about first taking the time to listen. To listen to each other and to listen for God. The time will soon come for us to begin making plans. But when it does, those plans will unfold based on the vision of who and what God is calling us to be as a congregation. Our plans will be that which helps us live out that vision and make it a reality.

But before we get there, we have to finish the process that we started. Interestingly, before we ever started, Eric McKinney asked me an unexpected question. He said, if this process is not successful, what will be the reason for it failing? After mulling the question for a few days, I finally answered him. I said if it fails it will be because we did not have the patience to let it completely unfold. It will fail because we rushed to act on incomplete information.

That's where we find ourselves. We are about to begin our last round of Holy Conversations, the one that will turn us toward home, so to speak. We will wrestle finally with the question of who and where God is calling us to be in the future. It is the last step, but in many ways it is the most

important step. This is where it all begins to come together. Following this last round of Holy Conversations, the Core Leadership Team will begin formulating a recommendation that will be presented to the congregation later this spring. And then we move boldly into the future.

For the process to work, for it to be authentic and for us to be authentic is our quest to discern God's dream for us, we need everyone to be on board. If you have yet to sign up to be a part of this last conversation, I hope you will do so today. You can do so through the link below.

<https://signup.com/client/invitation/6775657374/1823025/false#!1823025/false/false>

We have committed to follow not our own ambitions or desires, but to follow God. It is a bold step, and one that we have to take together.

See you Sunday.